*162 **151. The Preponderance of the Widows.**—The current Census has enumerated 114,105 widowers and 183,308 widows which establishes the characteristic preponderance of the widows over the widowers. The proportion for the entire State works to 5·4 per cent. widowers and 10·7 per cent. widows as against 3·4 per cent. widowers and 8·2 per cent. widows recorded by the Census of England and Wales in 1921. The contrast will be brought home by the fact that while in the State out of 183,308 widows there are 10,525 widows at ages below 25, the English Census of 1921 on the other hand, discloses only 6,000 such widows in the total population of 1,622,000 widows which yields a proportion of 3 per cent. for the State and ·3 per cent. for England leading to the conclusion that widowhood before 25 is practically non-existent among the English women.

While 905 per 1,000 females are married and 73 widowed in the age-period 20-40, it will be a real surprise to find the statistical ratio undergoing change in the next age-group 40-60 which has only 584 married females and 410 widows per mille and in the next higher group 60 and over the widows proportion increases to 778. In this connection the widowed state amongst the males increased from 83 to 226 in the group 40 to 60 and 320 in 60 and over. This preponderance of the widows over the widowers is a common feature of the Indian Census and arises from the comparative longevity of females but mainly from the greater freedom of marriage amongst the widowers and prohibition of widow re-marriage amongst the Hindus and only partial prevalence of the custom in other communities.

A reference to Subsidiary Table I reveals a sudden jump into widowhood as the females pass from 20-40 group into 40-60. In the 20-40 group there are only 73 widows per 1,000 while in the 40-60 group there is a sudden expansion of the widows proportion to 410 per 1,000 which is about six-times higher than the preceding group. The increase in the case of males proceeds more gradually from 83 in the group 20-40 to 226 in the group 40-60 and 360 in 60 and over.

582 587 The explanation for the larger proportion of widows is to be found in the custom of child marriage coupled with the evil of pre-puberty intercourse which inflicts serious physical injuries upon the immature parents, and ups in the bud the life of many a young husband dooming the poor child-wife to perpetual widowhood. The practice of marriage of old men (especially of the moneyed class) who already stand upon the brink-hold of the next world with young virgins in the bloom of life further increases the proportions of the widows since the mysterious hand of death soon falls upon the bridegroom who is soon called upon to exchange the warmth of the nuptial bed for the icy chillness of the tomb. The third and the strongest factor responsible for the preponderance of widows, which is chiefly contributed by the Hindus, is the injunction of the Hindu Shastras which enjoin enforced widowhood and prohibit re-marriage of the widows of the first three castes—The Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas. Neither reservations nor widow re-marriage is possible. The wife is enjoined to look upon her husband as an embodiment of God and offer complete submission to his will and discipline during life and in the case of his death the widow is enjoined a religious life of the complement chastity and prayer and is not to think of a fresh union but to practise fasts and austerities. The sacredness of the perpetual union led to the practice of 'Sati' wherewunder the widows burnt themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands to maintain unsullied the sacred bond of marriage even in death. Such being the religious sanctions it was only natural that observance of this institution should be followed with great strictness by the followers of Hinduism and in spite of the law permitting widow re-marriage and the activities of various social organizations especially the Arya Samaj, the Hindu society has not been able to shake off the shackles although one meets with a few instances of widow re-marriage here and there. The Hindus and Jains and even some Muslim castes of the State observe the prejudice against widow marriage although in the interior of the Dagger country among the Thakkars and some other castes of the hills, some laxity prevails and the widows are taken over as wives by the brothers of the deceased husband. The Muslims and Brahmins of the State also do not practise it on a large scale though their religion permits such marriages.

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4 [Errata: read 'upon'; of errata sheet p. 230, category 6 -- Analysis]